



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

mvasaudubon.org Vol. 47 (February, March, and April)

President's Letter

As we fly into a new year, I'm proud that MVAS continues to offer a wide range of opportunities for our members and the community. We host four bird walks, an educational meeting, a nature journaling adventure, and a service project each month. Our biggest day of the year is the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), with dozens of birders gathering data for this international community science project.

In addition to these regularly scheduled activities, we started 2025 with a field trip to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and field trip coordinator Linda Miller has more trips in the planning stages.

MVAS also does outreach and education programs throughout the community. For example, we had a table at the Outdoor Economic Conference and held a bird walk for some of the attendees. Volunteers led students in owl pellet dissection and helped some kids learn to identify several local birds and use binoculars.

These are just a few of the projects taken on by our volunteer organization. As with any community group, what we can do is limited by the volunteers who are willing to help. We are fortunate to have outstanding bird walk leaders: Dylan Osterhaus, Jonathan Brooks, Mark Pendleton, and our newest additions, Julia Osgood and Pat Bowen. Dylan and Julia are also board members. Mark Pendleton leads Las Cruces and La Luz Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) while Wayne Treers handles the Caballo CBC. Aaron Lucas takes charge of our monthly service project, cleaning up Sagecrest Park, supported by a revolving team of volunteers. Julia Osgood and Ellen Jaffe Castello co-lead the MVAS Nature Journal Club with me. These are just a few of the people who dedicate their time and skills to MVAS.

But we could be doing even more with your help! For example, our conservation committee needs both a new chairperson and new members. In the past, this active group has spearheaded the publication of a book on creating a backyard bird habitat, focused attention on reducing outdoor lighting to support birds, and responded to community concerns related to birds and their environment. If these topics are important to you, please consider volunteering to be on the conservation committee!

How else can you help MVAS? The first and easiest thing is to make sure you've renewed your membership for 2025. It's only \$15 a year and the funds support a wide range of activities and projects. You can find renewal information on our website, mvasaudubon.org.

Another helpful thing is taking part in bird walks, meetings, and the park clean-up. You can even attend our monthly meetings on Zoom if you don't want to drive to NMSU.

Continued on back



Election Results

Congratulations to our new and re-elected board members! We still have one at-large board position open, so if you know of someone who would fit the bill, please let Cheryl know.

We also want to thank our outgoing board members and officers: Diane Moore, Sid Webb, and Gill Sorg. We appreciate every thing you've done to support MVAS and the birds!

There are other people who contribute to our organization like, Christmas Bird Count Coordinators Mark Pendleton and Wayne Treers as well as our Adopt-a-Spot Coordinator Aaron Lucas.

Board Position	Term	Name
President/MVAS NJ Club	2025	Cheryl Fallstead
Vice-president	2025	Elaine Stachera Simon
Treasurer	2025	Judy Wilbur
Secretary/MVAS NJ Club	2025	Julia Osgood
Board Member/Webmaster/Field Trips	2023-2025	Linda Miller
Board Member/Newsletter	2023-2025	Marcia Wilson
Board Member/Membership	2023-2025	Annie Mitchell
Board Member/Butterflies	2023-2025	CJ Goin
Board Member/Bird Walks	2024-2026	Dylan Osterhaus
Board Member	2024-2026	Whitney Watson
Board Member	2025-2027	Randy Gray
Board Member	2025-2027	Vacant

Photographing a Ladder-backed Woodpecker Nest Site

by Nirmal Khandan

This summer I stumbled upon a Ladder-backed Woodpecker nest site at Leasburg Dam State Park. While scanning the patch of Cottonwood trees at the south-end parking lot, I saw a Ladder-backed Woodpecker flying by and disappearing behind a dead trunk just adjacent to the handicapped parking space. Walking around, I was thrilled to find a newly drilled, perfectly circular hole at a height of about 25 feet that I could get pretty close to.

I watched the site from my car for about an hour as both the male and the female took turns bringing food to the chicks every 15-20 minutes; typically, they would fly to a perch on a nearby tree and then dart towards the nest following the same trajectory. I spent the next several days photographing the parents as they approached the nest bringing food for the chicks.



Then I stopped by the site several times from May 30. I didn't see any activity after July 6. It was fascinating to observe a couple of other avian visitors checking out the Woodpecker's nest.



For the camera geeks out there, I used a Nikon Z8 mirrorless camera + 400 mm f4.5 lens with a wireless remote trigger. I mounted the gear at a height of ~6 feet on a tripod and placed it ~12 feet away with the sensor parallel to the path to the nest and manually locked the focus ~6 inches from the nest entrance. Seated inside my car (and keeping the gnats out), I could fire off photos as the parents took off from the perch at 20 fps, f6.3 @ 1/4000s and auto-ISO in silent mode. Since the nest opening was facing southwest and was in deep shade in the afternoons, I did most my shots in the mornings when there was side light but not direct light.



MVBSP Bird Blind Poster & Bird Photography

By Sid Webb

Greetings! It is time to update our bird blind posters at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park (MVBSP) and all visiting bird photographers are invited to share their photos to help make it happen. These posters are located at the bird blind, just west of the visitor center.

The posters are meant to help visitors learn about the birds of this area. Themes for past posters have included *Seasonal (Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall)*, *Year-Round*, *Rare*, *Endangered*. More ideas would be welcomed (e.g. *Birds in Flight*, *Raptors*, etc.). All photos should be taken on the state park grounds. More recent photos are preferred, with those taken in 2024 and 2025 being ideal.

We invite all park visitors coming with a camera to participate. You don't have to be a member of the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society or a resident of Doña Ana County. All pictures with a brief description and any comments you have will be most welcome. We need all the help we can get!



White-tailed Kite. On a monthly Mesilla Valley Audubon Society bird walk on 2/5/2024, this very inquisitive bird followed the group for over 15 minutes, allowing us all a chance to become well acquainted with him. Photo by Sid Webb

For interested photographers, please send a digital copy of your bird photo to sidwebb@gmail.com, with the heading "MVBSP Bird Photo," or provide a copy to the MVBSP Visitor Center help desk or the park's main office. They will forward it to me. Deadline for submission is 3/31/2025.

In advance, thank you very much. Sid Webb



Photos of Mountain Bluebird and Juniper Titmouse from Wikipedia.

Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)

Caballo CBC by Wayne Treers

Saturday, December 28, 2024. We had a beautiful day to bird – no rain, no snow, sunny weather, and a high in the 60s.



- No. of Participants: 22 (7 teams of birders)
- Total Individual Count: 17,414 (about average)
- Total Species Count: 131 (includes general sp. and sub species)
- Unusual/Rare Species: 1 (Willet)–never seen before in Caballo CBC
- Count Week Species: none
- Number of High Counts for Species: 7 (2 tied record highs, 3 set new record highs: yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and House Finch)
- Number of Low Counts for Species: 33 (10 tied record lows including Clark’s Grebe, Juniper Titmouse, and Mountain Bluebird)

Thanks to all who birded in this year’s Caballo CBC. All had to get up early and bird all day. I appreciate everyone’s extra effort to make the Caballo CBC successful. See you next year!

La Luz & Las Cruces CBCs by Mark Pendleton

Both Christmas Bird Counts: NMLL (La Luz) on Saturday, December 14, 2024, and NMLC (Las Cruces) on Saturday, December 21, 2024, were successful this year. Any day that one can get out and take part in an invigorating bout of citizen science is on multiple levels a success! I want to extend a vote of thanks to all the participants in both Counts.

On the La Luz CBC special thanks goes to Sonja, Rex, and Susan who drove from Socorro to take part (and Sonja in NMLC as well). Also to Christy who drove to La Luz from Corona to count birds.

Everyone who took part in the Las Cruces CBC (and especially team leaders) also get an extra dose of appreciation from me. Why? I am the compiler and was absent due to a second bout with COVID.

An extra muchas gracias to Fernando Mondaca Fernandez, the compiler for the Ciudad de Chihuahua CBC! He was in Las Cruces over the weekend of the 14th and took part in our CBC. Maybe some MVAS members could repay the favor next year!

Due to complications from COVID and computer snafus (see **Name That Bird!**) the CBC results are not compiled yet. When they are (ASAP) I will email them to all the participants and get them posted to the MVAS website.

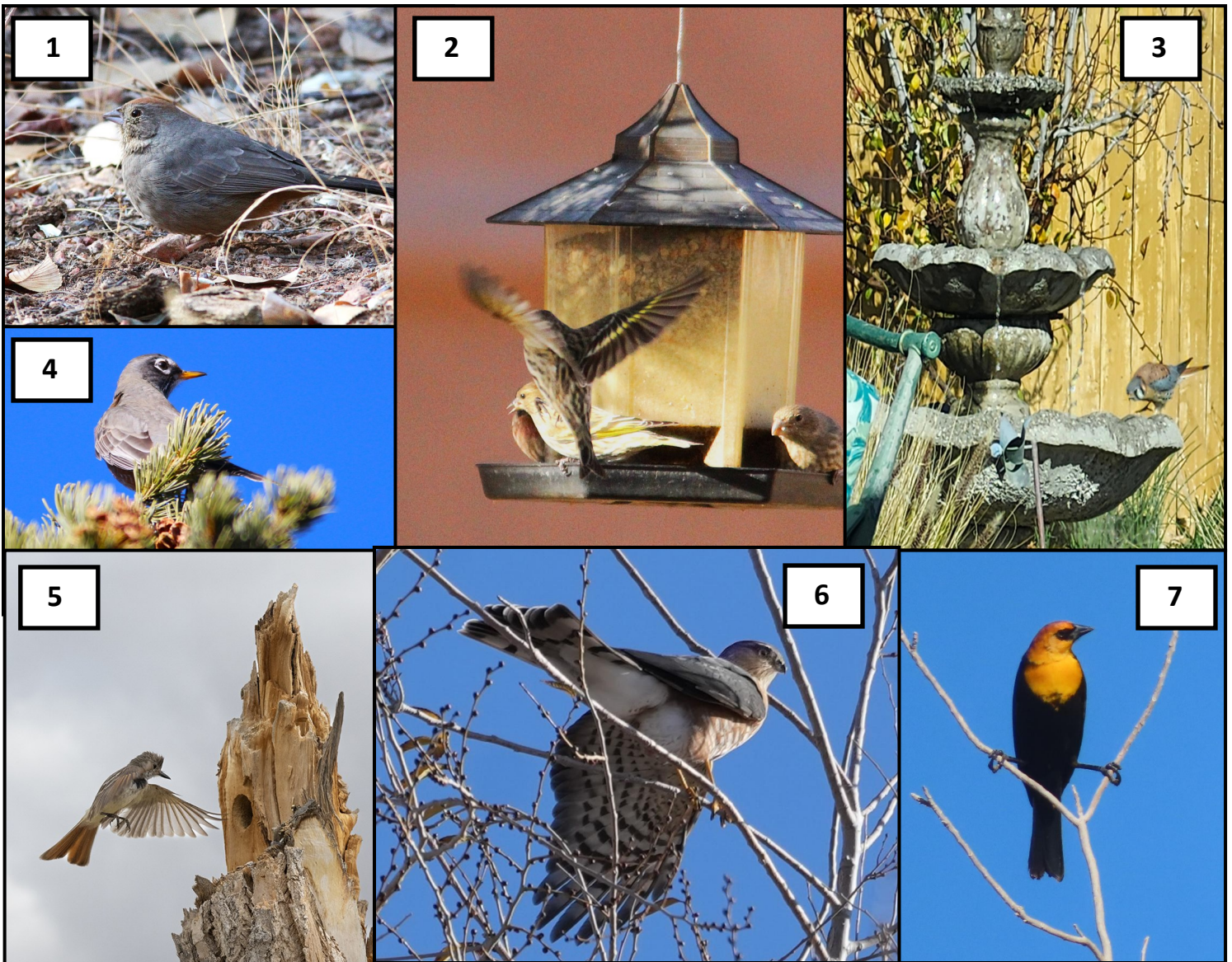
Name That Bird!

By Mark Pendleton

Since the previous issue of *Roadrunner Ramblings*, you responded enthusiastically to the call for more bird photos! So, thank you! And please keep them coming, since without them there would be no **NTB!**

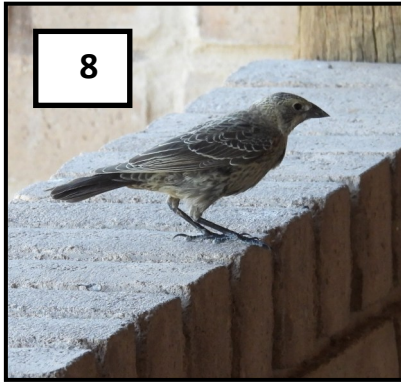
This month will be different than usual. Without boring you with all the details, I was without a computer for a couple of weeks. I have one now, but I still need to set it up. So rather than wait for that, here's how we'll proceed.

This installment of **NTB!** will consist of all the photos received since the last *Roadrunner Ramblings* issue. They will be numbered and there will be no panelist commentary or identifications. Instead, we invite any of you who so desire to email mpndltn@gmail.com with your best guesses at what each bird is. In a couple of weeks or so, I will convene the panelists to get their input. I will then write up the results and post them on the MVAS website. I hope you all enjoy this new twist on **Name That Bird!**



Name That Bird!

continued





Field Trip to Bosque del Apache NWR

January 24-25, 2025

By Linda Miller



Fifteen birders enjoyed two days of birding at Bosque del Apache NWR in San Antonio, New Mexico. Despite the freezing weather all enjoyed a great time. On Friday, we met at the visitor center for lunch. We then ventured out to see what birds we could find. We were hoping for a fly --in at dusk. Unfortunately we only saw a few cranes fly in. The ponds were mostly frozen and the cranes seemed to be confused on where to land. That evening we had a delightful meal at Jackson Ranch Steakhouse in Socorro, New Mexico. Because of the lack of cranes flying in we cancelled fly-out in the morning. (Of course, because we didn't go to the refuge that day for the fly-out, thousands of Snow Geese started flying out just after 6:30 a.m. Two of the members camping caught the tail-end of Sunday morning's fly-out.) On Saturday, we went out and birded again doing the south and north loops before we headed home. A few people that camped stayed over until Sunday.

Some of the species seen: Sandhill Cranes, Canda Geese, Snow Geese, White-tailed Kite, Western Meadow Lark, Northern Shovelers, Mallards, and Northern Pintail.

Blue Butterflies

by CJ Goin

Blues are a subfamily of Gossamer-winged Butterflies. Blues is an appropriate term because most of them have blue on the upperside of the wings, at least in males. They are very small and fly close to the ground so they are easily missed if you're not looking for them. The most common Blue in our area is the Marine Blue (L photo). They are strongly striped with gray-brown and can usually be identified by the large black spot at the bottom of the underside of the hind wing. They are usually the most abundant butterfly here in spring and their numbers decline in summer. The Western Pygmy-Blue (center photo) is a tiny butterfly - the smallest in North America - and is fairly common in our area. It is best identified by the two-toned color of the underside of the wings -gray at the base with the upper part tan-orange. They have a row of black spots at the bottom of the undersides of the hind wings, unlike the single black spot usually seen on Marine Blues. The Reakirt's Blue (R photo) is less common here than the first two but they are not rare and can often be seen by watchful observers. They are very light gray on the underside of the hind wings with a conspicuous row of white brimmed black spots. All of these are best identified by seeing the undersides of the wings but they usually perch with their wings folded which makes identification easier.



Marine Blue



Western Pygmy Blue



Reakirt's Blue

Upcoming MVAS Bird Walks

February, March, and April 2025

February 8 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier.

February 19 (Wednesday) Tellbrook Park Bird Walk, 8:00am –10:15am.Meet at the park entrance, 4290 Winchester Road.

February 22 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am.Meet at the visitor center and plan to carpool to the day-use picnic area on the river. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat).

March 3 (Monday) Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am.Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

March 8 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am.Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier.

March 19 (Wednesday) Tellbrook Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am.Meet at the park entrance, 4290 Winchester Road.

March 29 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am. Meet at the visitor center and plan to carpool to the day-use picnic area on the river. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat).

April 7 (Monday) Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am. Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day-use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

April 12 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park Bird Walk, 8:00am– 10:15am. Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier.

April 16 (Wednesday) Tellbrook Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am. Meet at the park entrance, 4290 Winchester Road.

April 26 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park Bird Walk, 8:00am–10:15am. Meet at the visitor center and plan to carpool to the day-use picnic



Female Ladder-backed Woodpecker photo by Nirmal Khandan

area on the river. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat).

Upcoming MVAS Activities

Continued

Park Clean-up

February 16 (Sunday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up, 8:00am–9:00am. Buckets and grabbers are provided.

March 16 (Sunday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up, 8:00am–9:00am. Buckets and grabbers are provided.

April 13 (Sunday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up, 8:00am–9:00am. Buckets and grabbers are provided.

Nature Journaling Activities Separate from the Art Show

March 8 (Saturday) Nature Journaling the Zuhl Museum at NMSU, 1:00pm–3:00pm

April 19 (Saturday) Nature Journaling at Soledad Canyon Day Use Area, 1:00pm–3:00pm.

Field Trips

April 12, 13, and possibly 14 (Saturday – Monday): Bitter Lake NWR field trip

We are working up an exciting field trip with some special activities at VP Elaine's favorite place to bird in New Mexico. Watch email for details! For those camping, there is a nearby state park, Bottomless Lakes State Park.

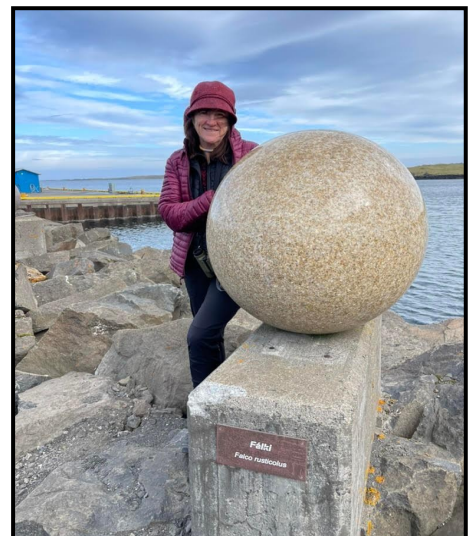
May TBD Cherry Creek Field Trip.

Monthly Meetings are held every month except June and July at NMSU Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom. Meetings begin at 6:30pm with a social time followed by a presentation from 7:00pm–8:00pm.

February 19 (Wednesday) The talk is titled **Touring Iceland: Waterfalls, Wagtails, and Wind**. Our presenter is former MVAS president, Jennifer Montoya about her travels to Iceland. Zoom: (<https://nmsu.zoom.us/j/81880890082>) She will cover what it's like to travel the famous "Ring Road" She'll also provide birding tips. If you are looking for some first-hand insight to the land of the fire and ice, join us on February 19!

March 19 (Wednesday) Our speaker will be Rob Wu who will be speaking on basic butterfly identification for our area. Zoom link: (<https://nmsu.zoom.us/j/81283001013>) Rob has worked throughout the Southwest since the early 2000s. He is based in the Las Cruces area, and works as a consultant in natural resource management.

April 16 (Wednesday) Topic and speaker TBD



Jennifer Montoya in Djupivogur, Iceland, along the avenue of giant seabird egg sculptures. This is as close as she got to a Gyrfalcon!

MVAS Nature Journal Club Takes Part in Art Show

By Cheryl Fallstead

The MVAS Nature Journal Club is part of an exhibit that opens at the Branigan Cultural Center on Friday, February 7, and continues through Saturday, May 24. "Wildlife of the Mesilla Valley" features sculptures and nature journaling that explore our fellow desert denizens, including our feathered neighbors.

My husband, sculptor and art instructor Brian Fallstead, conceived of the show and invited his students to participate. We then expanded the scope of the exhibition to include framed pages of nature journaling by MVAS Nature Journal Club members. Nature journaling is the practice of using words, pictures, and numbers to record observations of plants, animals, and other natural elements.

In addition to viewing the sculptures and nature journaling pages, MVAS members and the public are invited to take part in the many activities being offered at the museum in conjunction with the exhibit. Here's what's on the schedule.

Friday, February 7, 6:00pm. The show opens at 5:00pm. with a reception and Brian will give a talk at 6:00pm entitled "The Value of Observation in Wildlife Sculpture."

Saturday, February 15, 10:00am Brian will teach a hands-on sculpture activity during which participants will sculpt a squirrel from the museum's collection.

Thursday, February 27, 5:00pm-7:00pm. Try guided sketching of animals in the museums' collection, led by Cheryl and Kay Gross. Open to public as part of the art show.

Thursday, March 20, 12:00pm. Cheryl will give a Pull Up a Chair presentation entitled "Create a Deeper Connection to Nature Through Nature Journaling." Talk open to public as part of the art show.

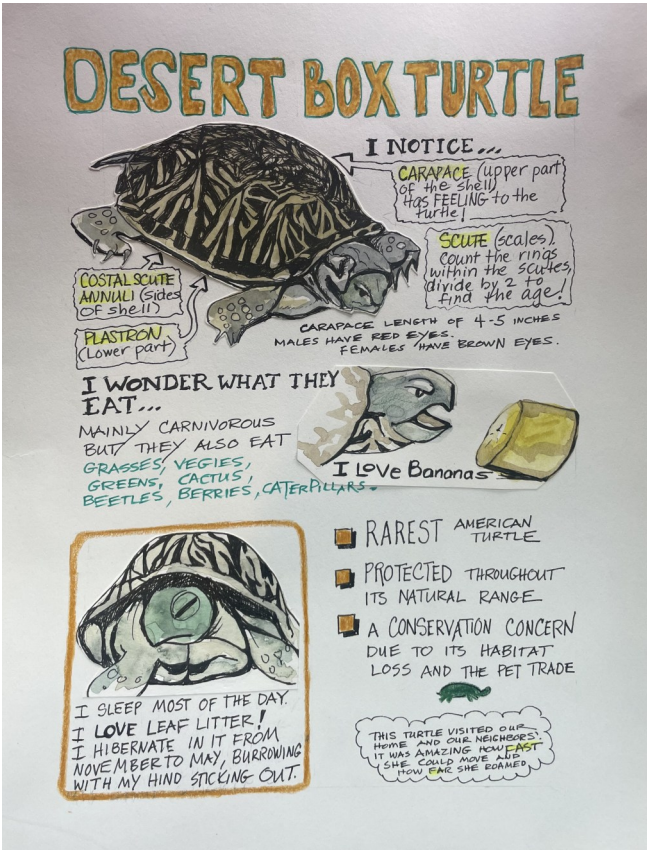
Saturday, April 5, 11:00am-1:00pm. Introduction to nature journaling class at the Museum of Nature and Science during which participants will learn how to nature journal and sketch live animals from the museum's collections.

Thursday, April 17, 12:00pm. Brian will give a Pull Up a Chair talk entitled "From 2-D Image to 3-D Sculpture: The Artist's Craft."

Saturday, May 10, 10:00am-12:00pm. Brian will do a wildlife sculpting demonstration in the museum's courtyard.

Artists participating in the "Wildlife of the Mesilla Valley" exhibit are sculptors Rejina Christopher, Brian Fallstead, Pat Grace, Rosario Jeremias, and Martha Roditti. MVAS Nature Journal Club members contributing to the show are Ellen Jaffe Castello, Cheryl Fallstead, Kay Gross, Rusty Hendley, Yvette Hinojosa, Ann McPhee, Julia Osgood, Donna Popky, and Rebecca Rousseau.

The Branigan Cultural Center is located at 501 N. Main St. and the Museum of Nature and Science is at 411 N. Main St. Both museums are open Tuesday through Friday from 10:00am-4:30pm. and Saturday from 9:00am-4:30pm. There is no admission charge.



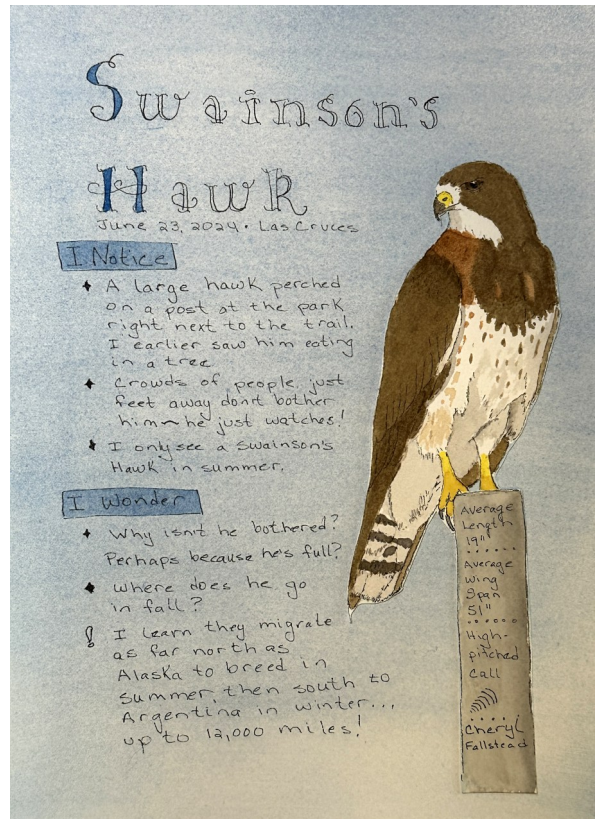
Desert Box Turtle by Rusty Hendley



Little Red by Brian Fallstead



Great Blue Heron by Rejina Christopher



Swainson's Hawk by Cheryl Fallstead

Officers and Board

President: Cheryl Fallstead

Vice-president: Elaine Stachera Simon

Secretary: Julia Osgood

Treasurer: Judy Wilbur

Board Members (elected with 3-year terms)

Board Member 2023-2025: CJ Goin

Board Member 2023-2025: Annie Mitchell

Board Member 2023-2025: Marcia Wilson

Board Member 2023-2025: Linda Miller

Board Member 2024-2026: Dylan Osterhaus

Board Member 2024-2026: Whitney Watson

Board Member 2025-2027: Randy Gray

Board Member 2025-2027: Vacant

Committee Chairs

Conservation: Vacant

Education: Cheryl Fallstead

Field Trips: Linda Miller

Programs: Cheryl Fallstead

Newsletter: Marcia Wilson

Website: Linda Miller

Membership: Annie Mitchell

Christmas Bird Count: Mark Pendleton, Wayne Treers

Facebook admin: Dylan Osterhaus

Climate Watch Coordinator: Mark Pendleton

Roadrunner Ramblings is published quarterly and is distributed via [the MVAS website](#), with a copy emailed to all MVAS members and friends. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit articles of interest and any bird photograph recently taken. Please email your contributions to Marcia Wilson at sleeping-safe@yahoo.com. To be added to the distribution list, contact Cheryl Fallstead at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history experiences.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

A chapter of the
National Audubon Society



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www.mvasaudubon.org

MVAS Dues Hawk asks, have you paid your MVAS dues yet?

Dues were due in January. You can go to the MVAS website and pay today. By collecting annual fees at this time, the board will have a clearer idea of our financial status for the upcoming year, which helps with planning for the year ahead.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE OF PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Of course, you can volunteer to serve on a committee or even fill that one last board position we have open. Email me at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com for more information!

You can help the birds by educating friends and neighbors about the importance of adding native plants to their yards, keeping cats indoors, and reducing outdoor lighting. Every little bit makes a difference!

My sincere gratitude goes to our board members (see the story about the election update), bird walk leaders, park cleaners, CBC leaders and participants, nature journal club leaders, and everyone who takes part in MVAS activities. We appreciate you!

Cheryl Fallstead
MVAS President